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UNDERSTANDING STUBBORN INEQUITIES:

A CRITICAL LESSON IN HISTORY

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Abstract

The K12 teaching corps in the U.S. remain majority White, while student demographics are and will continue to be much more racially and ethnically diverse. This discrepancy is linked to lower academic outcomes for students from marginalized groups. Through the application of elements of critical race theory, particularly the concepts of critwalking and of movement building, as well as critical whiteness studies, we have created a professional development exercise for K12 educators. The exercise is focused on the normalization and institutionalization of racism in the U.S. and centers a timeline history that exposes the systemic, historically rooted, and legalized ways that the nation has, over time, denied access and opportunity to individuals from marginalized groups. In this paper, we detail the professional development exercise, focusing on how we consider it to be both pedagogical critwalking and movement building. The timeline exercise intends to help equip educators not only to understand the history that created and supports institutionalized racism and other forms of marginalization in the U.S., but also to challenge it in their classrooms and schools today. That is, we want educators to recognize their role

in disrupting Whiteness and the larger system of White supremacy. We do this by first exposing K12 educators to evidence that shows that institutional racism has been normalized in the U.S. and can be demonstrated through a historical review of policies and practices. We then encourage K12 educators to use the knowledge gained from this exercise to challenge traditional, deficit views by linking the historical patterns of a lack of access and opportunity to the disparities they see in their classrooms today and in U.S. society and institutions at large.

Keywords: history, racism, timeline, critwalking, movement building

Gramsci and Hoare (1971) aptly stated, “The starting point of critical elaboration is...knowing thyself as a product of the historical process to date which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory” (p. 628). Yet, many educators are ignorant of these historical traces and approach their teaching in ahistorical ways, bypassing how history has impacted the present-day realities of the students and families they serve. That is, they fail to see the disparities in their classrooms and schools as historically linked. While current disparities in educational outcomes are typically not framed within history (Alexander, 2012; Carter & Welner, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Patel, 2016), systemic racism and inequality contribute to the disparities between White and higher income students on the one hand, and students of color and students from lower income backgrounds on the other. Systemic racism also contributes to neighborhood segregation, employment opportunities, and race relations in broader society. In the professional development exercise that we detail in this article, we expose how various forms of oppression intersect to maintain the status quo, and directly relate to stubborn inequities—that is, the differences that continue to exist in social, political, economic, academic, and other outcomes across different groups of people (Lipsitz, 1998; Locke, 2017; Shapiro, 2004; Steele, 2011; Theoharis, 2009).

Our goal is to work with educators to build their critical literacy around history, power, privilege, access, and opportunity, and challenge dominant and uninformed ideology. Specifically, in this article we detail how we have put the concepts of movement building and critwalking into practice through a pedagogical exercise that we hope moves forward the promise of education as a public good, and positively impacts the education of students who have historically been underserved by the institution of K12 education in the U.S. The exercise we detail below has been used with multiple audiences, with positive responses. We believe anyone can benefit from this lesson. However, as educators who center justice and equity, we believe an important audience for this exercise is teachers. We particularly want to make an impression on those teachers who work with students from racialized and marginalized groups (students of color, students

from low-income backgrounds, English language learners, and so on) (Cobas, Duany, & Feagin, 2015; Lopez, 2001; Theoharis, 2009), such that they may better serve the students and families in their classrooms and communities.

THE NEED

Research has confirmed (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 2006; Milner, 2010), and we have seen through our work, many teachers and pre-service teachers alike lack a solid understanding of the history of the U.S. in terms of the systemic and institutional means that have and continue to deny access and opportunity for advancement, particularly for those who carry marginalized identities. In many places, but especially in a rural and majority White state like Iowa, where we work and live, it is probable that a student of color may never experience a teacher or a school leader of similar race or ethnicity during their time in the K12 system. Furthermore, the teaching and leadership corps, and those who are now in teacher and school leader preparation programs in Iowa, remain largely White and middle class. Thus, the trend of school staff being majority White is not going to shift any time soon, even though student populations are shifting. Locke and Schares (2016) discuss these shifts. They state,

The U.S. Census (2013) calculated the [major] racial/ethnic demographics of Iowa to be...White 92.5%; Black/African American 3.3%; [and] ... Hispanic/Latino 5.5% ... the percentage of White students in Iowa's public schools has been on a downward trend for several years. However, the percentage of [students of Color] has been on the steady rise, with a current total of 21.1% of the student body (100,151 students). (p. 104)

As of the 2013-2014 academic year, the largest student group were Latinx, who comprised 9.7% of the student population in the state (Locke & Schares, 2016).

Locke and Schares (2016) go on to discuss the demographics of K12 educators in Iowa. They state, "Of the approximately 34,500 full-time Iowa public school teachers, only 2.2% identify as "minority".... [And of the] 1,150 full-time Iowa public school principals, only 2.6% identify as "minority" (Iowa Department of Education, 2014, p. 108).

However, by 2060, Iowa's public schools can expect half their students to be non-White (Finney & Kummer, 2014).

This significant disparity between the racial and ethnic demographics of educators and those of students has become ever more important to us as equity and justice-oriented scholars of education in Iowa. Research has confirmed that racial mismatch between teachers and students, particularly for African American students, predicts negative academic outcomes (Bates & Glick, 2013). However, when students of color experience even one teacher with a similar background, academic outcomes improve (Gerhenson, Hart, Hyman, Lindsay, & Papageorge, 2018). Moreover, White teachers continue to hold deficit views of, and have lower expectations for, students of color (Harris, 2011; Irizarry, 2015; Papageorge, Gershenson, & Kang, 2018). Research has also confirmed that students of color experience more and harsher discipline in schools than their White counterparts (Skiba, et al., 2011; Welch & Payne, 2018).

Additionally, in our own work, it has become clear to us that educators 1) are not prepared for future changes in the K12 student population, and 2) do not understand many of the students and families they serve. This is not a surprise given the disparities in the racial/ethnic makeup of educators and students (Locke & Schares, 2016). Furthermore, scholars have noted that much of the content taught in K12 and even in university environments has been whitewashed for decades (Loewen, 2007; Takaki, 2012; Zinn, 2015), minimizing White complexity and culpability in discussions about racism and inequality and their perpetuation in U.S. society (King & Brown, 2014; Loewen, 2007; Zinn, 2015). Educator preparation programs rarely feature racism and inequality in their curricula (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Stachowiak & Dell, 2016; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). This is a dangerous predicament because when knowledge is lacking, stereotypes and myths quickly fill the gaps. These trends and knowledge gaps are not unique to Iowa but are problems faced by many schools and institutions of higher education across the nation.

Given this lack of knowledge and understanding, we believe much of what happens in K12 environments centers on “fixing” kids (e.g., placing students in special programs; referring students for discipline).

This approach is an easy one for many White and miseducated educators, since identifying the limits of one's knowledge, experience, and practice can be challenging (Galman, Pica-Smith, & Rosenberger, 2010; Howard, 2003; King, 1991). For White teachers, reflecting on how their practice may not be effective, how their ideas and understandings may not be accurate, or how they benefit from a system that is unjust and denies access and opportunity to others, can cause all sorts of reactions. These reactions are based on gaining awareness of systemic racism and inequality and result in White fits [White tears and White guilt], which are products of White fragility (DiAngelo, 2018). This emotional process can coincide with feelings of sadness, anger, frustration, and guilt (Kordesh, Spanierman, & Neville, 2013) and can lead to resistance to authentic learning about racism and inequality.

Further, educators are often “unable to grasp” (Matias, 2016, p. xiii) the significance of racism and sexism and how they have morphed from explicit or overt examples like lynching, redlining, and exclusionary hiring practices to implicit or subtle examples such as disproportionate sentencing for minor offenses, zero-tolerance policies in schools, and pay inequity favoring men (Alexander, 2012; Feagin, 2010). White teachers frequently have a hard time letting go of the narratives they have been told about meritocracy and hard work, as well as the U.S. national lullabies of freedom, liberty, and justice for all. However, when White fits are tolerated, the gap in our understanding of each other widens. Thus, in our view, White people, including many White educators, are the folks who need to be “fixed.” White educators, as the dominant racial group of teachers and leaders in U.S. schools, must play a role in countering racism, which includes understanding the history of inequality in the U.S. and reflecting on their positionality and privilege within the systems that advantage them (Banks, 2009; Freire, 1970). Failing to examine and address the roles Whites and Whiteness have played in historical and present-day marginalization, particularly for White educators, implies that they do not have a responsibility to think about race and racism or to contribute to their schools' racial climate. To educate *all* students, educators also have a responsibility to challenge their racial beliefs,

stereotypes, and myths to serve this purpose with fidelity. Further, they have a responsibility to interrogate practices and policies in their schools and districts that unfairly and/or disproportionately impact students and families from marginalized groups.

TIMELINE AS CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

A basic definition of pedagogy is the methods and practices used in teaching, whereas critical pedagogy underscores the *how* and *what* of the content being taught. According to Breunig (2016), “Critical pedagogy is a way of thinking about, negotiating, and transforming the relationship among classroom teachings, the production of knowledge, the institutional structures of the school, and the social and material relation of the wider community and society” (p. 259). Our timeline exercise as critical pedagogy cultivates consciousness “appropriately attuned to problems associated with power and to the fostering of practices by drawing attention to the inequitable distribution of influence and privilege” (Alexander, 2018, p. 903) in U.S. society. The timeline helps teachers’ development of ideological clarity by juxtaposing the deficit orientation they may have about students from marginalized groups and forces them to better understand “if, when, and how their belief systems uncritically reflect those of the dominant society and perpetuates inequitable conditions” (Sleeter & Carmona, 2017, p. 29).

This pedagogical exercise is also an application of critical whiteness studies (CWS), which challenges the ideas that “White” is a neutral, objective, unbiased, perspectiveless, colorblind reference point representing what is normal, acceptable, and good (Mills, 1997, as cited in Leonardo, 2009). CWS is a means to expose the “invisible structures that produce and reproduce White supremacy and privilege,” and advance the importance among White people to be vigilant in examining how they benefit from a broader history and system that suppresses and marginalizes other groups (Applebaum, 2016, n.p.). Further, Whiteness is “conceptualized as a constellation of processes and practices rather than as a discrete entity (i.e., skin color alone)” (DiAngelo, 2011, p. 56). Perhaps most importantly, CWS centers Whiteness as *the* problem of racism (Applebaum, 2016).

Given that our audiences are predominantly made up of White teachers, it is important that we use a variety of means to expose systemic racism, as Whiteness allows White people to be unwilling to identify the polymorphism of racism and to avoid identifying with any particular racial or ethnic group, thereby minimizing the racist legacy of the country (Frankenberg, 1993, as cited in Leonardo, 2002, p. 32). We try to provide media that are as diverse as possible to push back on these tendencies of Whiteness. Our approach to teaching content through a timeline is based on this adaptive teaching taxonomy (Franzoni & Assar, 2009). That is, our use of a timeline in conjunction with multiple media such as video clips, historical documents, and photographic images provides a myriad of ways to expose racism, inequality, and whiteness and affect teachers' ideology and critical consciousness.

Moreover, in our unique critical pedagogical approach, we specifically highlight the history of U.S. laws and policies, rather than begin with a message such as, "This professional development exercise will focus on your unearned privileges as White people." Although we acknowledge that U.S. law is not neutral, within the political structure of educational institutions, these laws and policies can be presented by instructors as historically accurate. That is, these dates, laws, and policies (i.e., documented events and factual evidence) have nothing to do with an instructor's perceived "liberal" ideas or agendas, or with a direct interrogation of personal unearned advantage. These laws and policies are "on the books" (i.e., documented events) regardless of an instructor's ideas about justice, opportunity, access, or fairness.

THE BIG PICTURE

The use of timelines as instructional tools is not new. They have been used as visual means to summarize materials in a variety of fields including health (Berends, 2011), engineering (Atman, et al., 2007), and education (Adams, Bell, Griffen, & Adams, 2007; Locke & Blankenship, 2015; Strunk, Locke, & Martin, 2017). Timelines as 'infographics' can be used to demonstrate chronological history and patterns where learners can then easily make connections between individual events and their relationship to particular eras. Further,

timelines may help to make explicit the concurrency of seemingly unrelated events or expose a correlational relationship surrounding historical events (Hines, 2006).

Our critical pedagogical exercise centers a timeline of U.S. history that ranges from the year 1607 when Jamestown, Virginia, was founded to present-day 2018 (a span of 411 years). It focuses on events, enacted laws, legal decisions, and policies specifically related to education, access, and opportunity. While we start the timeline in 1607 in Jamestown, Virginia (establishment of the oldest permanent English occupancy [we prefer this term over “settlement”] and the location where the first individuals who were enslaved were disembarked), we note that all the while lands were being stripped from Indigenous people, who were being forcibly removed, relocated, and killed. As we move through the timeline, we expose the length of time that the U.S. legalized oppression and denied opportunity for people of color and other marginalized groups (e.g., 246 years of slavery + 88 years of Jim Crow = 334 years, which encompasses 81% of the timeline). This enumeration highlights the comparatively short period of time since the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts of 1964/65 (53 years, only 13% of the timeline). The dates and events help to historicize the intergenerationality of racism as it has been foundational to the nation since its inception. Further, the content helps us to expose the intentional and structural advantage of Whites and, importantly, the intentional and structural disadvantage of people of color, women, differently-abled people, non-gender conforming people, and so on. It clearly demonstrates that our history has never been neutral, objective, unbiased, perspectiveless, or colorblind.

OUR APPROACH

We start our timeline professional development exercise by broadly asking the educators in attendance why it is essential to spend time talking about the history of inequality in the United States. We let attendees ponder this and discuss it with a nearby partner. This pedagogical approach provides us with a baseline for how the teachers understand and contextualize their teaching efficacy. This strategy is designed to prompt teachers to reflect on their own assumptions

and beliefs about education and the students they serve, as students no longer fit neatly into the strictly constructed categories used to highlight our differences (Ladson-Billings, 2013).

Commonly, attendees congregate with friends or educators with similar interests (i.e., similar grade or subject area), so we begin by mixing up their conversation partners and engaging them in focused, small group discussion. This strategy minimizes groupthink, a pattern of thought that stems from “collective denial and willful blindness,” which reinforces manufactured consent and conformity (Bénabou, 2012, p. 429). Asking teachers to work with someone new generates increased discomfort and unfamiliarity, which facilitates a largely White group of educators in authentically grappling with Whiteness and how they participate in it, rather than collectively and willfully denying its existence. While we want to keep the teachers engaged, we also want to push back on the comfort that White folks often experience in a system that centers their contentment (Delgado & Stefancic, 1997). In mixed groups, we ask educators to reflect on the following questions: (1) What is your teaching philosophy? (2) What is implicit bias? (3) What does social justice mean to you? The discussions around these questions in mixed groups helps the educators begin to think about how their socialized worldviews may influence their answers.

Next, we discuss a few of our working definitions. For example, we define social justice as a recognition that public educational systems in the U.S. have not been set up to address the needs of all individuals, particularly those from historically marginalized groups. Social justice, then, is a recognition of this history and a questioning of policies and practices (institutional and individual) that marginalize/oppress/exclude individuals or groups based on race, ethnicity, language, gender, gender identity, sexuality, immigration status, SES, level of education, rurality/urbanity/location, ability, religion, parental education, parental involvement in schools, and so on; or deny access and/or opportunity based on the above. In a social justice approach, human dignity/common humanity is respected, and all voices are heard, respected, and integrated into decision-making practices, especially decisions that affect those most marginalized. Relatedly,

we also discuss our working definition of equity as it pertains to educators. We see equity as a responsibility to understand the history of inequitable access and opportunity and to work to ensure that the people served by schools (students and families) get what they need with an understanding that people's needs are different. Pedagogically, these working definitions help to foreground the participants' learning for the subsequent exercises.

After the attendees have completed these small group exercises, we provide all of the attendees with a handout and ask them to begin to think about U.S. history over time (see Figure 1, which includes an image of the handout). The handout is intended to be a "worksheet" and includes an image of a timeline that begins with the year 1607 and stretches to 2018. The attendees then have the opportunity to brainstorm and jot down the dates of major events and policies that have promoted or impeded social justice in the United States. We provide a few examples of events and policies to get them started, but not the year or era when they occurred. For example, we ask questions like, when did enslavement begin and end? When was the Jim Crow era? When were federal Civil Rights Acts passed? When was *Brown v. Board of Education* decided?

We purposefully do not provide the years (or allow them to look up this information on their phones or tablets) because often attendees do not know the actual year(s) and think these things happened long ago in the distant past. An objective of the timeline exercise is to expose and impress upon the educators that these events and policies occurred or were established much more recently than they may have thought. Getting teachers to reflect on how recently these events and policies occurred is important to expose the lack of progress we have made and the incongruity between national rhetoric and reality. This pedagogical approach allows the participants to do some hands-on and tactile work, while assessing their personal knowledge of historical events. While the participants typically do not remember many dates, they often seem humbled that they, as educators, may not remember when *Brown v. Board* was decided or when slavery was abolished. The small group discussions and worksheet exercise also help to expose the perspectivelessness that is inherent in Whiteness. That is, since many

of the White educator attendees (or their families) were not impacted by such policies or practices, they often remain ignored. As Locke (2017) suggested, “Being White is so much easier than not being White...[so Whites often] don’t have to think about how [their] race might be impacting [their] lives negatively” (p. 40).

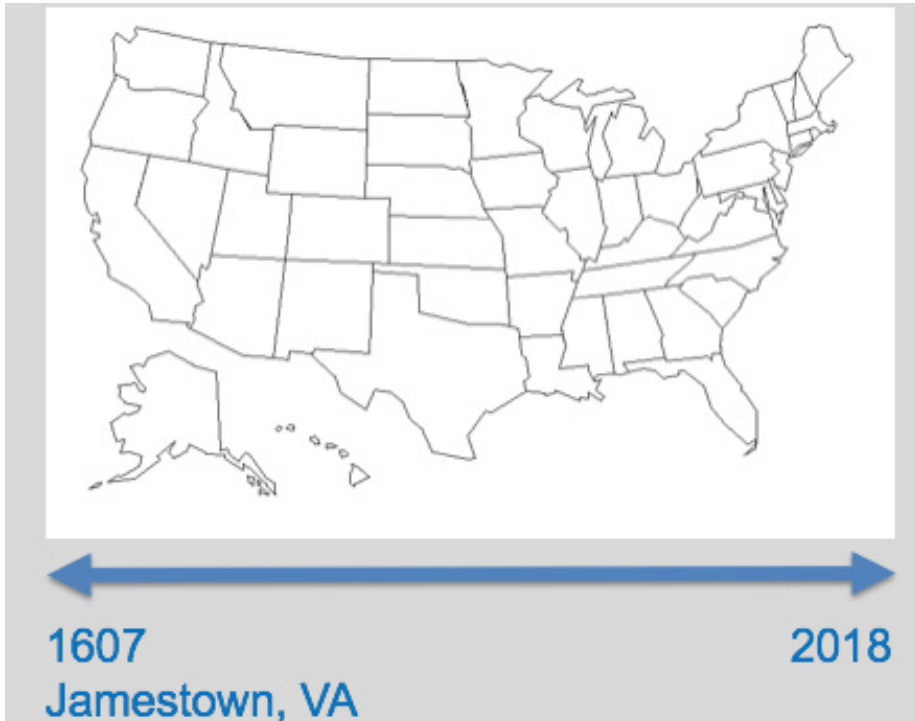


Figure 1. Example handout worksheet created by Locke and Getachew.

Once the attendees feel comfortable that they have completed the timeline “worksheet” to the best of their knowledge, we come together as a large group and begin to discuss what we consider to be some significant events concerning social justice issues in the U.S. We then hand out a detailed timeline that reflects our discussion which can be found in Strunk et al. (2017). This timeline is particularly useful, as it not only presents individual events and the introduction of policies, but it also effectively helps us to expose “eras” such as the enslavement era, Reconstruction, Jim Crow, the Civil Rights Era, and mass incarceration. Because our audiences are majority White, an objective is also to expose the length of time that Whites have

been uplifted by political, social, and economic systems while others have been held down. Moreover, because we have limited time in the professional development session, the timeline we distribute allows participants to have a take-home resource that includes much more information than what we are able to cover in the session. Thus, a goal of the exercise and through the distribution of a detailed timeline handout is to be illustrative rather than exhaustive. That is, we want to show the “general arc of oppression and resistance in the U.S.” (Strunk et al., 2017, p. 77) rather than detail every event that impacted every marginalized group.

Next, we move through a series of slides. Many of the slides include similar content as that included in the timeline by Strunk et al. (2017). However, we have inserted other media that help to illustrate our objectives and enhance the participants’ engagement and learning (e.g., political cartoons, photographs, video clips, and descriptive statistics). We have found that it is powerful to use a variety of images and media that not only keep the attendees engaged, but also help us to demonstrate just how long systemic and institutionalized injustice has been going on in the United States and how the notion of “othering” is perpetuated. That is, we explore how and for how long physical and psychological divisions between Whites and folks of color been developed and maintained.

As we move through the years and some major events, with accompanying images on slides, we continue to discuss the concomitant genocide of Indigenous peoples and the wholesale theft of their lands. We highlight the number of years that the U.S. legally enslaved people, and the associated denial of access and opportunity (i.e., no access to education, no means to earn money or own property—alongside existing in brutal physical and psychological conditions). We also discuss events and policies such as the Chinese Exclusion Act and the treatment of Irish and Italian immigrants. We then move on to, for example, Japanese internment, and continue to the Civil Rights Movement. We typically include a discussion of Jane Elliott’s 1968 “brown eyes blue eyes” classroom experiment (which is particularly interesting for Iowa educators as Elliot taught in Riceville, Iowa) and explore legal challenges such as the 1972 *Lau v. Nichols*

case and various Propositions, such as 209 and 227, which focused on affirmative action and language, respectively. We also discuss redlining and the Government Issue (GI) Bill, and who did and did not have access to spaces and opportunities for advancement. We finish our timeline discussion with the election of the first African American president in 2009, Barack Obama, and the first woman presidential candidate nominated by a major political party in 2016, Hillary Clinton. We also make connections to “then and now” with slides extrapolating similarities between the Jim Crow era and the current context (i.e., mass incarceration), and how current immigration debates mirror those of the past.

Throughout the presentation, we are cognizant of keeping the focus on the historical roles racism and other -isms have played in housing opportunities, access to schooling, employment, and political participation while highlighting the space on the timeline that is consumed by outright and legalized denial of access and opportunity to individuals and groups. We also use a whiteboard or chalkboard (typically available at the schools where we present) to draw the timeline underscoring the events, policies, and eras discussed throughout the presentation. In Figure 2, we include an image of an example timeline. Again, using a variety of media (e.g., handouts, worksheets, small and large group interactive discussion, images, video clips, descriptive statistics) helps us to gain and retain the participants’ interest, and helps them to stay engaged with notoriously challenging content (Willingham, 2009). By exposing these eras, events, and policies, we aim to demonstrate how White supremacy has been perpetuated, as well as how even with a policy directed at an injustice, injustice tends to morph and resurface, requiring another policy or practice directed at the new reincarnated injustice. We want this information to help and support White educators in recognizing that White supremacy evolves and contorts, and is continuously reimagining and reforming itself. Further, we want them to see a need to develop their critwalking legs and make movement toward change, not only to understand history in a critical way but to be critical themselves and make necessary changes in their thinking and practice.

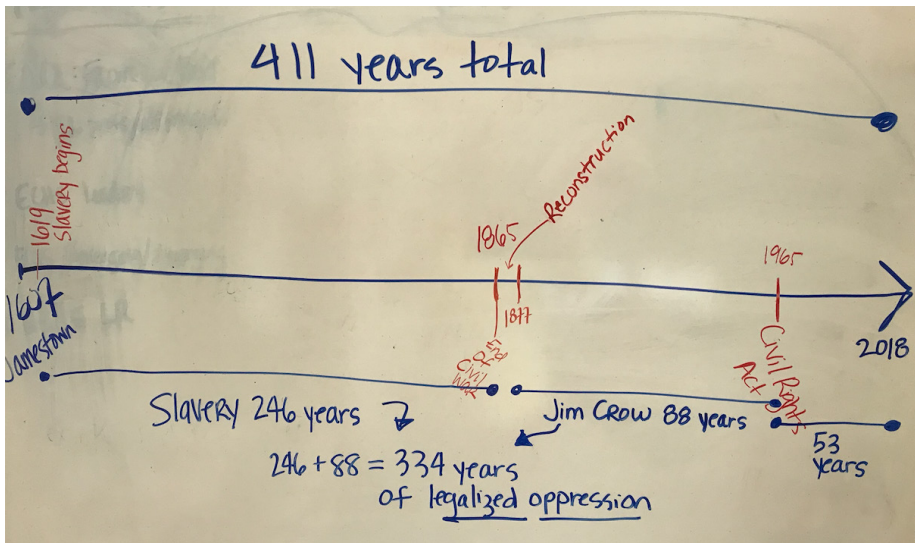


Figure 2. Image of timeline in use. (Note. A similar image also appears in Locke, 2017.)

We wrap up the historical perspective by showing the timeline information in a pie chart (see Figure 3), which underscores the disparities between legalized oppression and denial of opportunity (334 years= slavery + Jim Crow) and when it became illegal to deny access based on some aspects of individual identity (53 years since the passage of the Civil and Voting Rights Acts of 1964/65). At this point, many of the attendees are surprised, frustrated, and saddened. Here, we take a break and allow the attendees to think individually about what they have seen. After a few minutes, we ask them to form small groups and discuss the following questions: (1) What material presented today challenged your thinking? (2) Did anything you heard raise a new perspective for you? How so? (3) Did anything you have listened to raise ideas that trouble you? If so, what? The questions and related discussion help to encourage the participants to critique their own experiences and systemic advantages, and challenge how they have understood the students and families they serve in their schools (Smith, 2013). After the attendees have had the opportunity to process the questions individually and with one another, we come back as a large group and address issues that are specific to their district, school, classroom, grade team, or subject specialization. We also discuss their

classroom practice. That is, we discuss the student demographics in their schools, divergent student outcomes, and teacher practices. This allows the attendees to think about issues in their own schools and classrooms and connect what they have learned through the presentation to their own contexts.

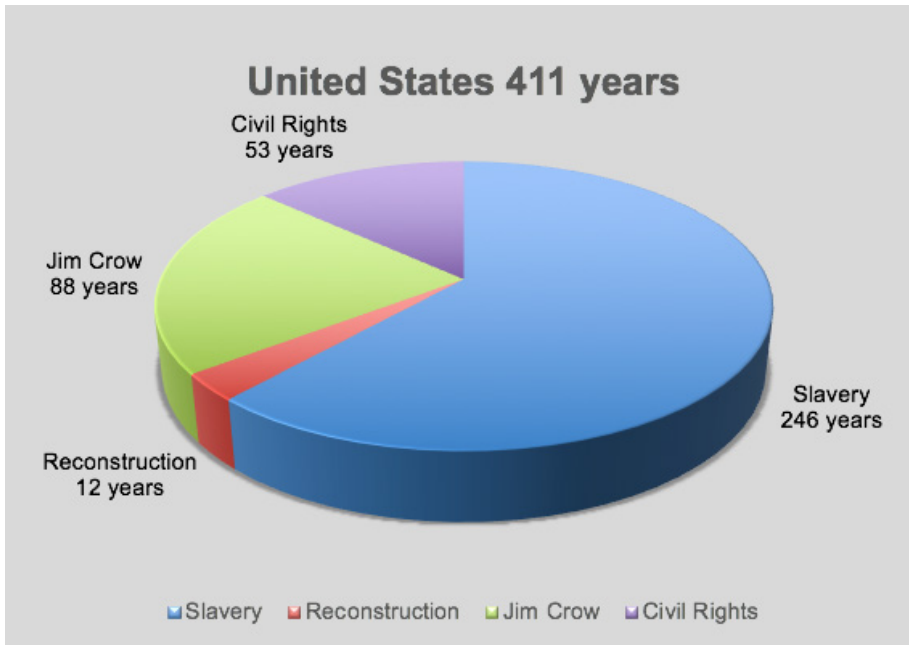


Figure 3. Pie chart showing years of inequality in the U.S.

We close the professional development session with a discussion about how we have been historically socialized to think about particular groups of people, a component of Whiteness, and how we might begin to unravel that socialization so that we can understand how our actions are influenced by dominant narratives that may be negative or deficit oriented. We conclude by conducting a simple math exercise. We ask, “What equals four?” We noticed that most of the participants respond with the equation $2 + 2$. We then ask, “What other ways can we get to four?” At this point, many attendees start to see a connection between their almost automatic response of $2 + 2$ and how we are socialized to think through a dominant and often one-way lens. They then discuss the many ways to get to four ($3 + 1$, $5 - 1$, 2×2 , and so on). Then, typically, the attendees are thinking about different

ways to impact their practice. Therefore, we end the presentation with a discussion on where educators can find information to include in their curriculum as well as good readings to improve their practice. In particular, we promote the usage of a website created by faculty and students in our college of education. This website is open for anyone to use (<https://uiowa.edu/social-justice-resources-k12-teachers/>).

As Lensmire et al. (2013) said, “It is time for us to move on to...more complex treatments of how to work with white people on questions of race and white supremacy...” (p. 412). It is not just about White privilege; it is about a structural and historical system with associated policies and practices that create, maintain, and perpetuate inequality. Because we directly focus on historical facts, the timeline allows information to be presented in ways that tend to bypass White fits and resistance to learning challenging material, while still exposing systemic and unearned advantages of White folks, i.e., White privilege. The privileges and advantages Whites have enjoyed as a result of the exclusion and denial of access and opportunity to others become subversively obvious without our efforts to make them explicit.

We believe the timeline is a strategic exercise that can expose the deeply rooted existence of racism and inequality and its manifestations today because it exposes the “several hundred years of historical evidence of America’s continued racist structure, policies, and practices” (Hughes & Giles, 2010, p. 46). It reinforces the idea that racism and White supremacy are the norm in America, not the exception. Further, the timeline helps us to discuss the realities and the intergenerationality of racism and White supremacy, specifically that America has always been color-conscious, and never colorblind.

We use the timeline exercise to critwalk with a goal to “[recognize and challenge] racism and interconnected forms of social, political, economic, and power dynamics” (Hughes & Giles, 2010, p. 41) in schools with K12 educators. Our aim is that a critwalking exercise through history will encourage educators to “pay attention to the long history and deeply embedded realities of the social constructions and cultural manifestations of race [and racism]” (Hughes & Giles, 2010, p. 43). Most importantly, we want this exercise to move the teachers to take action; that is, we want to help them develop their

own critwalking legs. We want them to take what they have learned from our exercise and reflect on their complicity in the system; to let go of, and challenge, traditional narratives around merit, hard work, and freedom, justice, and liberty for all. We want them to take concrete steps toward creating classrooms and school cultures that are thoughtful, respectful, asset-based spaces that reflect the students and families they serve. We want them to holistically address the needs and ambitions of these students and families. We want them to identify the system of White supremacy and to make movements to address it and challenge it through their practice.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Much of the current conversations surrounding schooling, particularly for those students who have been historically pushed to the margins (students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, English language learners, differently abled students, students who identify as LGBTQ, and so on), centers on “fixing” kids. Our view is that kids are just fine. Those who need fixing are those with power in the schools—the teachers and leaders whose charge is the education of *all* students. What needs to be fixed is our view of lives and communities as ahistorical and unrelated to the racist and white supremacist history of the U.S. The disparate student outcomes we see today are very related not just to history, but also to the ways we have been socialized to think about each other.

The beauty of the timeline as critical pedagogy is that it pictorially and effectively shows how recently, as a nation, we have instituted federal legislation protecting the rights of people based on some aspects of identity (e.g., race, gender). Without this education—a critical understanding of U.S. history—educators may continue with the status quo that minimizes race and racism across U.S. social, political, economic, and educational systems. Further, educators may continue to ignore systemic marginalization and their roles in shaping life outcomes for the students and families they serve.

Providing a “bird’s eye” view of the history of U.S. policies and practices that harm and marginalize individuals and groups, which exposes systemic, legal, and political systems that support White

supremacy (rather than a focus on individual acts of racism), illustrates the rootedness and intergenerationality of White supremacy and how it evolves and resurfaces. We want the White educators we work with to see and interact with this timeline and then to “critique and reckon with associated facts such as school zones, discipline policies, redlining, housing covenants, loan eligibility...and so on” (Locke, 2017, p. 42). We want them to be primed and ready to dig in and start thinking about their own complicity in the system and how they have, and continue to benefit from it. Lastly, we want them to make related changes to their practice to best serve all students and families in their charge.

While we agree with Locke and Schares (2016) that “efforts to recruit and retain a diverse teaching and leadership staff should be a priority for all districts as they strive to support an increasingly diverse student population” (p. 108), we must also work to develop the educators currently working in schools such that *all* students are able to freely bring their whole selves to school. This exercise allows us to put a spotlight on the complex system of White supremacy without recentering Whiteness. That is, the timeline is a critical and important lesson in history that refuses to normalize Whiteness as benign. Instead, it is a way to expose the historical and “pervasive investment in Whiteness [and how it] has shaped historical and contemporary racism in the U.S.” (Fasching-Varner, 2013, as cited in Locke, 2017, p. 39).

While this work is challenging, we are honored to do it. We have received positive feedback* on the timeline professional development exercise from local educators. While we appreciate this feedback, we do not know if the exercise has had an impact on changing teacher

* Listed here are a few comments we have received from past participants in our professional development session:

- Great presentation...compelling approach to teaching power and privilege.
- Very constructive and informative.
- I loved your timeline activity. I shared this with our [district Equity Coordinator]. Would you be interested in presenting at our school?
- I heard...that you...put on a PD that has started some really great conversations that I believe [our school] is long overdue at starting. I've already spoken to our principal and she's really excited at the possibility of you two coming.

practice (i.e., challenging the inequities they see in their classes, schools, and districts). This is something that could be discovered through a longitudinal study in a particular school or a set of schools. We hope to be able to do such longitudinal work, and we will also continue to provide the timeline exercise as professional development for educators as long and as often as we are invited to do so.

In schools, professional development sessions are often structured for short periods (e.g., 1-1.5 hours after the school day). Thus, the education within such short time frames must pack a proverbial punch. We have tweaked this timeline exercise to fit these time constraints and also to convey a message that is housed in a notoriously difficult topic. We believe, however, that more, consistent, and related professional development* must follow (DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2010), such as book studies, workshops, and self-guided learning supported and led by school and district leadership (Theoharis, 2009). Further, we believe that courageous conversations (Singleton, 2014) centered on historically rooted systemic inequity must occur consistently as part of any sincere professional development agenda.

We are hopeful that educators take the information from this exercise, critwalk, and are moved to implement it into their practice. Certainly, it is easy to incorporate this information into history courses. However, we have used a similar concept in a variety of courses. For example, in a qualitative methods course, we have used a timeline to discuss the development of research methods and the individuals who were and were not instrumental to the institutionalization and normalization of particular methods. We have also used it in education policy courses to illustrate the events and the establishment of policies that have impacted the education of students from marginalized groups over time (e.g., the establishment of public schools, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, *Brown v. Board*, *Lau v. Nichols*, *Plyer v. Doe*, Title IX, IDEA, ESEA, NCLB, and ESSA). Similarly, we look forward to the possibility of educators implementing timeline exercises in new ways in their classes and with their specific subject matter. For example,

* The Equity Literacy Institute is a great resource for equity—and social justice—related professional development. See <https://www.equityliteracy.org/>.

we wonder what a timeline history of mathematics that centered non-Western approaches might look like? Or a timeline history that centered non-western approaches to science? What would a timeline history of the dominant world languages look like? What about White women's history of political participation in the U.S. compared to that of women of color? Timelines may be very practical pedagogical means to the teaching of content across disciplines, for bridging theory to practice (Breunig, 2016), for challenging and uninformed dominant ideology, and for exposing the traces of history, while laying bare who has been included and who has been excluded from the proverbial conversation.

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